

From a collection of hand and typewritten pages of verse
by Elizabeth Durack – loosely assembled into five parts
by padc July 2010.

I The ladder tips ...

- 1 Not the loneliness of the wide plains (1942)
- 2 **L'envoi** (1993) *refer below*
- 3 Insomnia (1955)
- 4 Let night – (c.1954)
- 5 Remorse (1959)
- 6 on taking the psychiatrists seriously ... (mid
1950s)
- 7 **'Islands of Amnesia'** (mid 1950s) *refer below*
- 8 **Before leaving for a painting trip to Cosmo
Newbury** (1960) *refer below*
- 9 I don't want to sit down here (1961)
- 10 Oh soldier (1966)
- 11 I feel like a snake (1958)
- 12 King Tide (1995)
- 13 (+ 2 dreams ... c. late 1950s)

2 L'Envoi

Consciousness comes slowly
 slowly swelled by the stealthy streams of our senses –
 more than five of them.

A net-work of rivulets interlace
 rising almost imperceptibly
 in high and hidden places
 to ribbon down in cascades
 here and there hither and yon.

Some peter out
 some gather strength
 others cut clear channels.
 Some lose their way
 and form ox-bows that neither come nor go
 over the map –
 the great, dry, sprawling map of a life-time –
 the while, tributaries converge, gather momentum
 peak to flood level, subside.

Then
 heavy with mud, lees, detritus, sludge –
 fan out in a delta at the very edge of the sea.

But of all the streams that contribute to form
 the river
 which is the most seminal?

The hungry eye?
 the eager ear?
 tell-tale nose?
 testing tongue or tactile finger?
 And what of that
 un-nominated, un-mappable extra –
 separate, yet part of the whole,
 bestowed at birth
gratis
 by who knows whose
 fun-loving fairy god-mother?

#

Perth, October 1993

7 'Islands of Amnesia'

Isles of Amnesia!
 Oh how the very sound
 Lifts up these heavy feet
 Right off the muddy ground –

No Crusoe ever yearned
 Nor all earth's exiles
 As I yearn to sail forth
 To these happy isles

Swing up the anchor
 Billow the sail
 Fair or foul weather
 Trade wind or gale

Speed my light craft along
 Hasten the sailing
 Quick, or we're halted
 The sane are prevailing

There on the distant rim
 Past all the mapping
 See the white beaches gleam
 Ah, watch the space gaping

Under a sky serene
 Lost to a charted world
 See the fair coastline
 How sweetly and gently curled

Cunning it hides itself
 Safe from exploring
 Chiselled by fate's tools
 And all the gnawing

Of tears salt as oceans
 Of sighs loud as wind
 Look but you'll find it not
 Locked in my secret mind

No shirt will fly aloft
 No fire shall burn
 To guide a fool probing
 Who seeks my return

Safe on that hidden shore
 Read all my lying smiles
 No one shall find me here
 Here on my happy isles.

Perth, mid 1950s

8 **Before leaving for a painting trip to Cosmo Newbury**

I have a sense of
 irreparable loss –
 this I understand
 this I share –
 loss: irredeemable
 irreparable –
 Yet horribly, dreadfully
 inevitable.
 Inevitable like
 sunrise or the new moon –
 (that pale golden sliver
 blowing the bubble of its maturity – tonight
 as I walked up the lane –
 past the Hammonds
 sitting in the back garden
 with their friends and their daughter
 Marie – back from England –
 Guy's Hospital and all the gloom
 of it that takes on now, in her
 parents' admiration, a strange
 aura of romance and the exotic
 oddly at variance
 with the sober reality
 of her hard devoted diligence.)

As I walked down the lane
 the Sedgemans too were drinking
 pale beer – "and she said to me,
 '*that's not undercut ...*'"

Past the Smiths with the
 lights low and all in the deep
 devotional silence of
 television –
 a blue gloom through the curtain
 and a hush
 like church –

I have a sense of loss
 this I understand
 this I share –
 'Give me back
 what I have lost –'
 my heart cries
 but the jarrah fences
 grey in the twilight
 throw no echo –

Nor the big warm blue sea
that silently
inundates
in my dreams –
that comes on and on
with inevitable encroachment –
No splash
no foam
just engulfment
before the ladder tips backwards
as I reach the last
rung
and awake
crying crying crying
with loss –
irreparable
irredeemable
inevitable –
loss –
that I understand
that I share –

Perth, 20.12.1960

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